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Nevada's Blueprint for High School Improvement

NEVADA'S BLUEPRINT FOR HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Nevada's population is relatively small but it is the fastest growing state in the nation. This growth has dramatically impacted both the public school system and the Nevada job market. One example, school-aged and retirement-aged populations equal almost half of Nevada's total population. Although Nevada has had many successes, a look at Nevada's high school student population and student performance in relation to the changing job market motivates a call to action for Nevada's high schools.

Nevada's Reform History

To take a look at educational reform in Nevada requires that one go back to the mid 1990s, when the Nevada Goals 2000 plan was adopted, outlining key strategies, benchmarks, and time lines for developing challenging standards in each of the state's core academic subjects. Legislative policy brought greater focus to the accountability issue through an overhaul of the state testing system.

State policymakers worked together to author the *Nevada Education Reform Act of 1997* (*NERA*). This legislation was a major piece of state education reform policy, calling for change in the areas of academic standards, accountability, assessment, educational plans and goals, remediation plans, and technology. For several years, *NERA* guided state educational activities. Content standards, established by a legislatively mandated council, were adopted in the core subject areas; the high school proficiency exams were aligned to the standards; and reporting procedures were established. The state accountability system called for high school students to pass more rigorous proficiency examinations in English/language arts and mathematics in order to graduate.

In the same timeframe, Nevada's P-16 stakeholders participated in the pilot of the American Diploma Project in an effort to better align high school completion with college readiness. While Nevada did not fully adopt the recommendations of this project, the state greatly benefited from the research generated by the American Diploma Project and the research of Ed Trust. The results clearly indicated that a rigorous and relevant high school curriculum is a primary indicator for future success in post secondary endeavors. One of the goals within the American Diploma Project was to align the Nevada High School Proficiency Exams with college admissions or placement decisions. The P-16 Remedial Task Force was formed for the purpose of evaluating placement procedures and recommending academic strategies to reduce the remediation rate.

With the reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (the No Child Left Behind Act), a major effort was made in Nevada to retain the underlying principles of the *Nevada Education Reform Act*, while at the same time incorporating the necessary requirements of *No Child Left Behind*. In the Nevada version of *NCLB* (otherwise known as Senate Bill 1), significant changes were made to many of the previous education policies. As needs were identified and improvement efforts implemented, the need for high school improvement became apparent.

Nevada's Educational Governance

Nevada's public instruction system is organized around county-based districts with seventeen school districts governed by local boards of trustees made up of elected members. The Nevada State Board of Education is comprised of ten elected members (plus a non-voting student representative) and carries out

state education governance by leading the Nevada Department of Education in the implementation and evaluation of state and federal education activity. Nevada's System of Higher Education led by the Board of Regents governs the universities and community colleges in the state. The Nevada Statewide P-16 Council has an active agenda that brings together the education, business, and political communities to make policy recommendations that enhance coordination between the educational systems, with the overarching goals of preparing all Nevada high school graduates to begin credit-bearing work in post secondary education, to successfully complete apprenticeship programs, or to take their place in well-paying positions in Nevada's workforce.

Nevada's Population Growth

Nevada is a growing state with population increases in urban areas, while population decreases are occurring in some rural communities. According to the 2000 Census, there were 1,998,257 people living in Nevada. The 2005 projection of 2,442,116 is an 18% increase over the 2000 figures. Of the total population, 65% are white, 20% are Hispanic and less than 10% are in each of three other major ethnic groups.

Nevada's seventeen school districts reflect the unusual population distribution within the state. Clark County is currently the fifth largest school district in the country, having in excess of 280,000 students. An adjacent school district, Esmeralda, has fewer than 100 students enrolled in grades Pre-Kindergarten to Eighth (P-8). There is a corresponding variability in community makeup ranging from urban to rural, and even remote.

Nevada's High Schools

The increase in high schools reflects the growth in the state. There were 98 high schools last year, an increase of 19 high schools since the 2000-2001 school year. Forty-four percent of the high schools are in the Clark County School District and 17% are in the Washoe County School District. Table 1 shows the number of secondary schools for the last five years.

Table 1: Number of Public High Schools (2000-2005)

School Year	High Schools	Public Charter	Total
2000-2001	74	5	79
2001-2002	77	7	84
2002-2003	79	7	86
2003-2004	83	7	90
2004-2005	86	12	98

Over the six-year period, from the 1999-2000 school year to the 2004-2005 school year, the total number of all students Pre-Kindergarten to Twelfth (P-12) increased from 325,610 to 401,211. As stated in *Student Achievement and Graduation Rates in Nevada*, "Nevada's school enrollment grew 188 percent between 1970 and 2000 — the largest jump in the nation. Student population growth averaged 5 to 7 percent annually (nearly four times the national average) for some 15 years. The pace has slowed slightly, but demographers expect that Nevada will continue to lead the nation in enrollment growth for the next decade" (WestEd, 2005).

The total number of high school students (grade 9 to grade 12) increased from 85,966 to 111,215 (28% of the total student population). Nevada's Hispanic student population has grown at a particularly rapid

rate, increasing from 19.6% of the total high school student population in 1999-2000 to 26.2% in 2004-2005. There has been a corresponding increase in the numbers of students who do not speak English as their first language. Of the 54 different languages spoken in Nevada's high schools, Spanish is by far the most common, with 92% of Limited English Proficient (LEP) learners listing Spanish as the language spoken at home on the Home Language Survey. Table 2 shows the proportion of each ethnic group to the total high school student population. The White and Hispanic students represent the majority of the high school student population.

Table 2: Percent of Total High School Students of Major Ethnic Groups (2004-2005)

Major Ethnic Group	Number in Population	Percent of Total Population
American Indian	1,888	1.7%
Asian	8,283	7.4%
Hispanic	29,187	26.2%
African American	12,142	11.0%
White	59,715	53.7%
TOTAL	111,215	100%

Nevada's Commitment to School Improvement & Systemic Reform

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) puts forth the expectations that all students will benefit from learning within safe educational environments, being taught by highly qualified teachers, being tested annually in at least reading and math and in science at certain grades, and annually judging student, school, school district and state performance with respect to adequate yearly progress (AYP). The Nevada Legislature in 2003 passed legislation that, in certain areas, surpassed the requirements of the NCLB Act, taking progressive steps to best position Nevada's schools and school districts for success. Among the expanded expectations was the requirement that, regardless of AYP performance, improvement plans be developed/revised and implemented annually by schools, school districts, and the state through the State Board of Education.

Research shows that improvement initiatives require a consistent culture and belief system that drives goals, strategies and resources across all levels in the education system while maintaining a focus on improved teaching and student learning. Carefully crafted, implemented, and sustained standards-based school improvement planning is arguably the only chance for long-term success even among those schools that are currently performing at a level that exceeds performance expectations. The culture behind Nevada's improvement planning embraces high expectations and is built upon the foundation of the following beliefs:

- The work of schools is student learning.
- All children can learn and every teacher can be an expert.
- Content should be aligned, rigorous and relevant.
- Key indicators of success are achievement/proficiency scores, graduation rates, dropout rates, percent of highly qualified teachers, and adequacy and equity of funding for all public schools.
- Improvement is continuous.
- Parent support and involvement is critical to improved student performance.

Part of the comprehensive education bill adopted by the 2003 session of the Nevada Legislature required that the State Board of Education develop a state improvement plan (see Appendix A for Executive Summary). The Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 385.34691 established the requirements for this plan.

Under state requirements, the Board submitted the plan to the Governor, the Legislative Committee on Education, the Legislative Council Bureau, the Nevada System of Higher Education, the Counsel on Academic Standards, the Board of Trustees of each school district, and the governing body of each charter school in December 2004.

State Improvement Plan Goal Five: A Focus on Secondary Education

Goal Five of the Nevada State Improvement Plan focuses specifically on secondary education, giving priority to improvements in academic achievement, increases in graduation rates, decreases in dropout rates, improvements in distribution of information to the public, and increases in post-secondary program enrollment and success rates. State agencies, school districts, and schools are expected to increase the strategies that they are using in addressing these indicators of high school success.

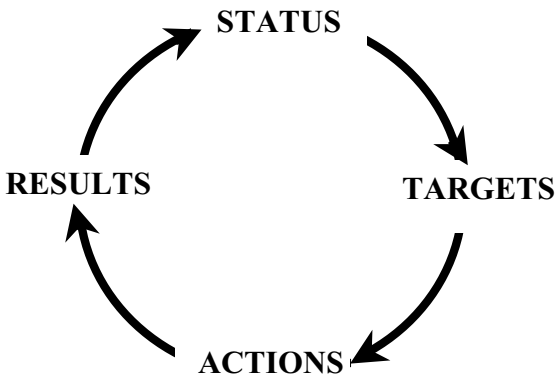
From the time of the development of the State Improvement Plan, additional data have been collected with respect to Nevada high schools that have underscored the need for serous consideration for improvement strategies. A coordinated effort by key education partners is being mobilized to raise student achievement in core content areas and narrow the achievement gap between overall student performance and the performance of ethnic groups and special populations. Systems are being refined that collect and analyze data concerning achievement levels, graduation rate, dropout rate, and post secondary activity. Through analysis of these data, the state, school districts, and schools will implement program improvement activities that increase student outcomes, that are responsive to the needs of special population and diverse students, and that reflect best practices.

Call to Action: From the State Improvement Plan to Nevada's Blueprint

Commissioned by Governor Guinn, the STARS work group was established to initiate the development of a blueprint for improving high schools in the state. The membership of the STARS work group included representation from the Governor's office, Nevada Department of Education leadership and staff, representatives from local school districts, and educational organizations. Several members of the STARS work group were members of the State Improvement Plan Work Group to provide consistency and alignment to the State Improvement Plan. The State Improvement Plan Work Group participated in the development of the Blueprint to ensure alignment to statewide improvement efforts. The State Improvement Plan Work Group will now serve as the Nevada High School Improvement Policy Team to oversee the implementation and evaluation of Nevada's Blueprint and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Honor States grant.

To investigate the improvement needs of the Nevada high school system, the STARS work group used the same process that was used to develop the State Improvement Plan. By carrying out the following steps: (a) comprehensive needs assessment, (b) inquiry process, and (c) master plan design, the workgroup ensured alignment between Nevada's Blueprint and the broader system-wide reform efforts. *STARS: Nevada's Blueprint for High School Improvement* will follow the state improvement planning process through the implementation and evaluation phases.

STARS: Nevada's Blueprint for High School Improvement focuses on priority goals to improve high schools. The STARS work group used the relevant portions of the State Improvement Plan as the framework for the Blueprint. The Blueprint is called STARS to exemplify the continuous improvement model embraced in the State Improvement Plan. The following steps guide continuous school improvement.



Status: Narratives/data that define where Nevada high schools are now.
Targets: Statement of where Nevada high schools want to be.
Actions: Strategic plan that defines methods to achieving targets for high school improvement.
Results: Outcomes that describe when and how Nevada high schools have reached their targets through evaluation that leads to a determination of new status.
Status: New data and narrative (that begins new cycle).

Additionally, STARS represents a plan that will focus on successful practices and schools and build a network of STARS. The *STARS: Nevada's Blueprint for High School Improvement* will utilize national models such as the "Model Schools" and "Promising Practices Schools" identified by the International Center for Leadership in Education, "Breaking Ranks" and other research based initiatives. It will build on Nevada's current successful high schools, expand the number of sites, and build a peer support network in collaboration with National partners. The improvement efforts laid out in Nevada's Blueprint have an ultimate goal: **providing all Nevada students with a rigorous and relevant education that prepares them for the wide range of post secondary options that are available, including but not limited to college and work readiness**.

Nevada High School Improvement Summit

The kick-off to Nevada's Blueprint for improving high schools is the first annual Nevada High School Improvement Summit sponsored by the Nevada Department of Education, the Nevada State Board of Education, the Nevada Association of School Administrators, and the Nevada Association of School Superintendents. There will be a broad representation of state-level and local-level educators, the Governor and staff, key legislators and staff, business and economic development leaders, post secondary education leadership, parent representatives and P-16 Council members.

Key Strategies of Nevada's Blueprint

The Blueprint is organized around the five strategies of high school improvement: value of a high school diploma, redesign high schools, give students the excellent educators they need, measure progress and hold high schools and colleges accountable, and improve education governance. Each strategy begins with a description of relevant high school data. The data builds the case for the goals identified for high school improvement. The goals are prioritized as initial implementation goals or long range goals in order to focus improvement activities to efforts that need to occur immediately, as well as to heighten awareness of the expected long-term outcomes.

THE VALUE OF A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

CURRENT STATUS

Graduation Requirements

The total number of credits required to graduate from high school is at least 22.5, with each district having the option of adding to the credit requirements. There are 15 units of core courses required for all students. The core courses are American Government (1), American History (1), Arts/Humanities/Career & Technical Education (1), English (4), Health (1/2), Math (3), Physical Education (2), Computers (1/2), and Science (2). The remaining credits needed to graduate from high school are considered elective credits and are not specifically identified by content area.

In addition to passing the core courses, every student must pass the Nevada High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) in reading, math, and writing in order to receive a standard, advanced, or adult diploma. If students achieve a passing score on any portion of the HSPE, they don't have to retake that portion. However, if students don't receive a passing score the first time, they may retake the test again until they receive a passing score. Currently, students have multiple opportunities to take the different portions of the test. For example, a student who took the HSPE reading and math tests for the first time in October of 2002 would be able to take them again in February, April, June/July, and October of 2003, and February, April, and June/July of 2004.

Outcome Indicators of High School Students

The Nevada Annual Reports of Accountability (commonly referred to as the Nevada Report Card) include three outcome indicators that may reveal the need for school improvement. These indicators are graduation rate, dropout rate, and completion indicators. Other student indicators include attendance rates, transiency rates, state assessment achievement results, and pre-college test results. Attendance rate data for Nevada's schools show that the state, as a whole, exceeded the pre-NCLB requirement of 90% previously in state law. In 2001-2002 the state attendance rate was 93% and in 2004-2005 it was 94.5%. The student population in Nevada is highly mobile, with a 34.1% transiency rate during the 2004-2005 school year.

Graduation Rates. The graduation rate published in the Nevada Report Card is a *student leaver graduation rate*. This rate is based on "leavers" (students who leave school as dropouts or graduates) and does not require the ability to track individual students over time. The calculation method is as follows: the number of standard, advanced, and adult diplomas divided by the number of standard, advanced, adult, and adjusted diplomas plus the number of certificates of attendance plus the number of dropouts from graduating class since entering ninth grade.

The graduation rate for Nevada in the 2003-2004 school year was 67%. As shown in Table 3 (below), the state graduation rate has been increasing until this last year. Last year's drop in rates can be partly explained by changes in the reporting criteria. The districts' 2003-2004 graduation rates range from 50.0% (Storey) to 93.2% (Douglas) and all districts showed fluctuations in increases and decreases over the five-year period. At this time, Nevada has one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation, which is partially linked to early student exit due to the current availability of service jobs in the hospitality industry, Nevada's largest employer.

Table 3: Five-Year Graduation Rates by State & School Districts

	1999-2000 Graduation Rate	2000-2001 Graduation Rate	2001-2002 Graduation Rate	2002-2003 Graduation Rate	2003-2004 Graduation Rate
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
NEVADA	66.2%	70.1%	72.0%	74.8%	67.0%
Carson City	84.6%	84.8%	91.9%	84.4%	81.8%
Churchill	75.7%	85.1%	87.9%	89.3%	77.9%
Clark	61.8%	66.1%	67.3%	71.7%	62.7%
Douglas	83.7%	87.0%	92.4%	90.9%	93.2%
Elko	81.6%	82.0%	84.8%	78.7%	70.1%
Eureka	95.8%	95.8%	86.4%	93.8%	100%
Humboldt	82.6%	85.2%	82.0%	81.2%	71.4%
Lander	76.2%	76.4%	82.5%	74.2%	77.6%
Lincoln	95.5%	98.8%	95.1%	81.3%	79.7%
Lyon	83.5%	83.8%	86.4%	83.1%	76.4%
Mineral	75.8%	70.9%	86.7%	76.0%	78.6%
Nye	67.0%	73.8%	81.1%	72.8%	54.1%
Pershing	93.2%	93.6%	88.3%	95.6%	87.7%
Storey	71.4%	65.9%	76.7%	70.8%	50.0%
Washoe	70.3%	74.9%	78.2%	80.3%	77.7%
White Pine	59.7%	66.5%	61.1%	81.4%	74.7%

The breakdown of the graduation rates for major ethnic groups is available for the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. The ethnic groups with the lowest graduation rates in 2003-2004 were Hispanic students at 52.6% (a 10.2 percentage point drop from the previous year) and African American students at 50.5% (a 9.1 percentage point drop). The ethnic groups with the highest graduation rates were White students at 74.7% (a 5.9 percentage point drop) and Asian students at 73.4% (a 7.5 percentage point drop). Planned enhancements to the state accountability information system include data collection components that will address graduation and dropout rates for special education, limited English proficient, and free and reduced lunch status student populations.

According to the *Achieve, Inc*. review, the graduation rate in Nevada improved from 1992 to 2002. However, of every 100 Nevada ninth graders, 62 graduated on time, 27 immediately enrolled in a college or university, 18 were still enrolled the next year, and 10 graduated from college or university within four years.

Dropout Rates. The dropout rate published in the Nevada Report Card is an *annual student dropout rate* and measures the percentage of students who dropout of high school in a given year. The calculation method is as follows: total dropouts plus total non-returns divided by total enrollment plus total non-returns, multiplied by one hundred. Consequently, a comparison to corresponding ninth grade student numbers cannot be made.

Over a five-year period, from the 1999-2000 school year to the 2003-2004 school year, the Nevada high school dropout rate decreased slightly from 6.1% to 5.8%. A look at the major ethnic groups indicates that the American Indian dropout rate had a slight increase over this five-year period, having one of the

highest rates (7.4%) of the subgroups (same as the African American rate) in 2003-2004. The African American and Hispanic dropout rates had a slight decrease over the five years, from 8.0% to 7.4% and from 9.2% to 8.2% respectively. The Asian dropout rate was the lowest of the subgroups in 1999-2000 (4.6%) with a slight increase in five years to 4.9%. The White dropout rate fluctuated over the five years and had the lowest rate (4.5%) in 2003-2004. For the state rate and all subgroups (except Asian) the 2000-2001 dropout rates seem an anomaly with noticeable change from the year before and the year after.

Completion Indicators. The Nevada Report Card reports the number of students completing high school who receive standard diplomas, advanced diplomas, adjusted diplomas, adult diplomas, and certificates of attendance. Table 4 shows the state results of diplomas and certificates of attendance for the 2003-2004 school year. Of the 18,705 Nevada seniors, 17,311 (93%) received a diploma or certificate of attendance. The majority of students received a Standard Diploma.

Table 4: State results of diploma/certificate acquisition (2003-2004)

Standard Diploma (22 1/2 credits & proficient scores on HSPE)		**Advanced Diploma** (24 credits, 3.0 + GPA & proficient scores on HSPE)		**Adult Diploma** (Requirements of adult education or alternative education program met)		**Adjusted Diploma** (Special requirements or adjusted standards met by student with disability)		**Certificate of Attendance** (Met all requirements except proficient score on HSPE)	
10,931	63.1%	4,042	23.3%	192	1.1%	1,195	6.9%	951	5.5%

To ensure the meaningfulness of a high school diploma, the State of Nevada developed challenging and rigorous academic standards and a system of assessment to measure student proficiency. State assessments are used in determining school and district adequate yearly progress, and the high school examinations must be passed by all students seeking a standard or advanced high school diploma.

To measure its standards, Nevada relies on local assessment programs but also administers a comprehensive system of large-scale assessment that includes criterion-referenced examinations, performance based examinations, and norm-referenced examinations. In developing its standards based assessments, Nevada has built steps into its development and scoring process to ensure that its testing frameworks and scoring rubrics are consistent with national standards. So, for example, the reading and math test matrices in Nevada closely match the NAEP assessment matrices.

Achievement Results

The tables that follow describe state-level test results, focusing on those tests used to determine AYP. The state-level test results in the tables illustrate student performance at the state and school level to more clearly identify areas that need improvement.

Reading Performance. Tables 5-6 illustrate trends in 10th grade reading performance by ethnicity and special populations. These trend graphs separate performance by year of test administration (2001-02, 2002-03, & 2003-04), allowing for across-year comparisons. Table 7 illustrates the variability of performance of schools in the state, disaggregated by ethnicity and special populations.

Table 5 – Trends in High School Proficiency Reading Performance at Grade 10

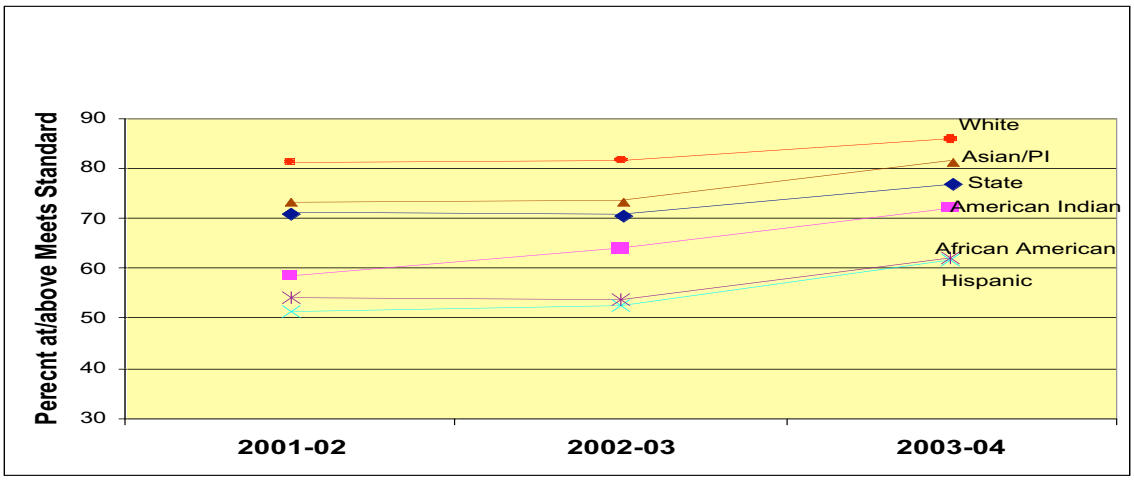
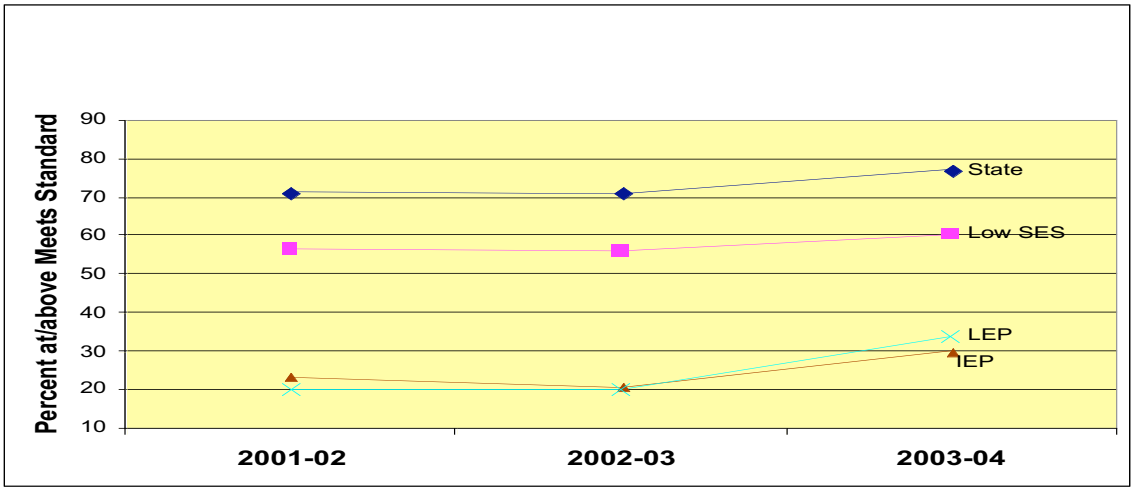


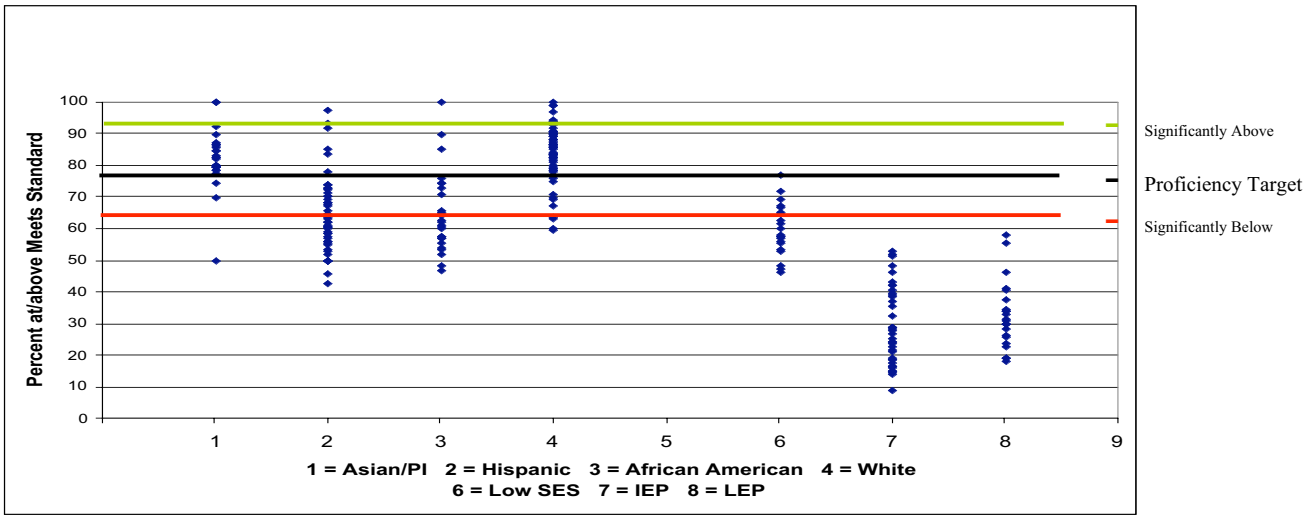
Table 5 shows the reading performance of tenth graders. The percent of proficient White and Asian students is above the state average (78%) while the percent of American Indian students is slightly below. Although the percent of proficient African American and Hispanic students is considerably lower than the state average, all groups are showing improved performance. (These calculations are made on first time administrations; students may retake the test to pass.)

Table 6 – Trends in High School Proficiency Reading Performance at Grade 10



In Table 6, similar differences between the gaps in proficiency rates are shown. Although achievement gaps remain, the proficiency rates of all four groups were higher. Students with disabilities (IEP) and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students showed significant improvement.

Table 7 – School Variability in Performance on the Reading HSPE at Grade 10 (2003-2004)



In Table 7, all the schools' low SES, IEP, and LEP student populations fell below the performance goal. A significant number of schools did not meet the performance goal for their Hispanic and African American student populations. [Note: American Indian (Label 5) student numbers were too small a count to reflect variability of performance.]

Math Performance. Tables 8-9 illustrate trends in math performance by ethnicity and special populations. Table 10 illustrates the variability of performance of schools in the state, disaggregated by ethnicity and special populations.

Table 8 – Trends in High School Proficiency Math Performance at Grade 10

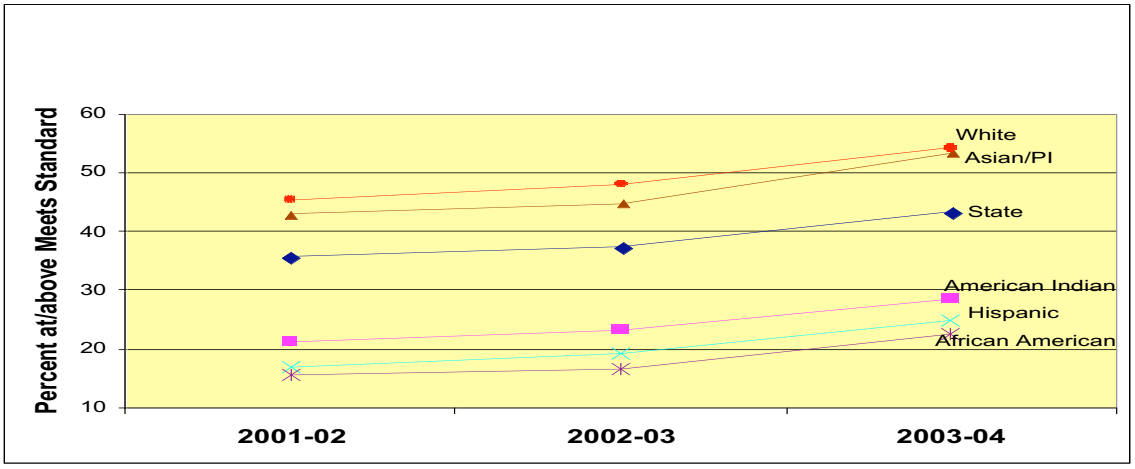


Table 8 shows the math performance of tenth graders. The percent of proficient White and Asian students is considerably above the state average (43%). The percent of proficient American Indian, African American, and Hispanic students is significantly lower than the state average. In Table 9, similar differences between the gaps in proficiency rates are shown. The percent of proficient LEP and IEP students is extremely low.

Table 9 – Trends in High School Proficiency Math Performance at Grade 10

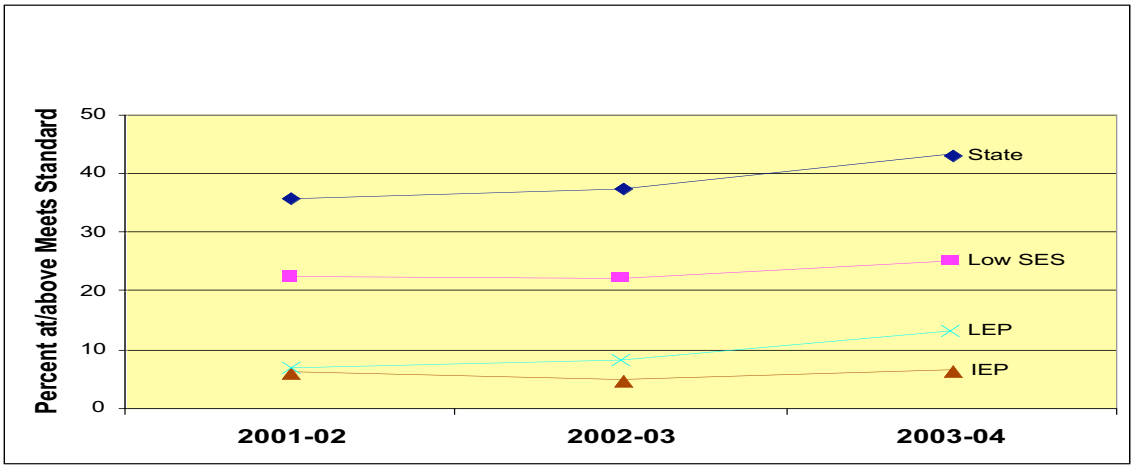
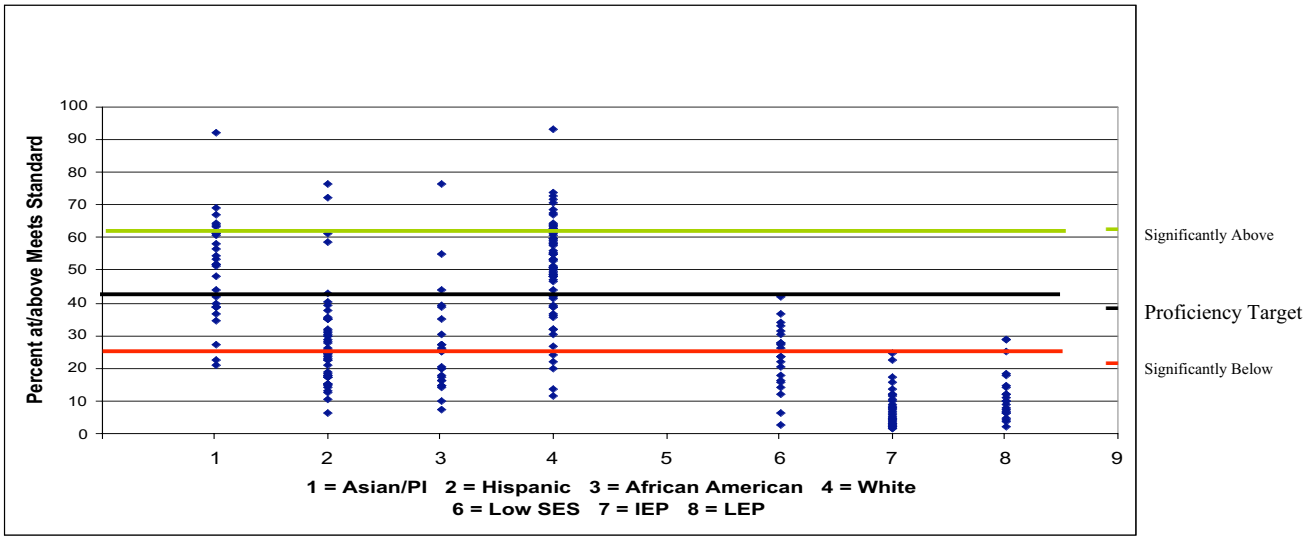


Table 10 – School Variability in Performance on the Math HSPE at Grade 10



In Table 10, there is quite a variation in school performance for the Asian and White populations, some schools do well while others do not. For the Hispanic and African American populations, a few schools are doing very well while a large number are performing below proficiency. For the low SES, IEP, and LEP student populations, all schools are performing below proficiency. [Note: American Indian (Label 5) student numbers were too small a count to reflect variability of performance.]

From the tables, some interpretations can be drawn. With respect to reading and math, there is a consistent pattern of achievement differences between student groups. Asian/Pacific Islander and White students perform above the state average and outperform American Indian, Hispanic and African-American students. Students with low SES perform below the state average. Performance between IEP and LEP students is substantially below the performance of all other student groups. Although consistent with national data, these trends present significant challenges for Nevada.

Results of Pre-College Tests

PSAT Student Results. According to the PSAT report of results, of the 28,600 Nevada sophomores, 69% (19,857) took the PSAT in the 2004-2005 school year. Both Washoe County School District and Clark County School District provided the opportunity for all students to take the PSAT with resource and policy support, which explains the large number of students taking the PSAT. Of those who took the PSAT, the most represented major ethnic groups were White students at 49.8% and Hispanic students at 23.2%. The average score for all tested was 38.1 in critical reading (compared to the national average of 42.5), 39.3 in math (compared to 44.2), and 42.1 in writing.

SAT Student Results. According to the SAT report of results, 7,065 Nevada juniors and seniors took the SAT in the 2004-2005 school year, a 10.5% increase from the previous year. The most represented major ethnic groups were White students at 58.1% and Asian students at 12.8%. The average score for all tested was 508 in Verbal (compared to the national average of 508) and 513 in Math (compared to 520). White students had the highest average scores in both Verbal and in Math. African American students had the lowest average scores in both Verbal and Math. When compared to the national averages, Nevada American Indian, African American, and Hispanic students had higher average scores, while Nevada White and Asian students had lower average scores.

ACT Student Results. According to the ACT report of results, 5,282 Nevada juniors and seniors took the ACT in the 2004-2005 school year, a 6% decrease from the previous year. The most represented major ethnic groups were White students at 63% and Hispanic students at 10%. Of the tested students, about 59% were core students and about 36% were non-core students (non-core are defined as those not taking college preparatory classes). The average aggregated composite score was 21. White and Asian core students performed the highest in all subject areas, with a score range of 20.8 to 23.2 (above the national average). African American students performed the lowest, with the non-core students having a score range of 15.1 to 16.6 in the subject areas. In all cases, core students performed higher than non-core students, with the greatest difference in performance in mathematics.

As pre-college tests, the SAT and ACT are both taken in Nevada. Each test is taken by students on a voluntary basis.

Advanced Placement Courses

A review of the Advanced Placement report of results shows that from 2003 to 2004 there was an increase in enrollment in AP classes of about 860 students (a 19% increase), with a 23.7 % increase in the number of students taking the exam. The average score was 2.81, with White students having the highest average of 2.87 and African American and Puerto Rican-Latino having the lowest average (approximately 2.3). The percent of students who scored 3 or above was 57.3%, compared to the national average of 61.5%. Over 60% of Nevada public schools participate in the AP exams.

Post Secondary Status

One of the goals in *STARS: Nevada's Blueprint for High School Improvement* is the enhancement of a systematic broad-based method for collecting information about students after they leave high school. Nevada has collected some data on the college matriculation of Nevada students. The state also monitors workforce activity. The relationship between high school completion and post secondary options is an area that needs further study.

College Matriculation. In the Fall 2004, 56% of Nevada's graduates opted to attend a college or university in Nevada or at another location within the United States. Approximately 75% of the adults in the state (25 and older) do not have a college degree. Only 6% of adults have a graduate or professional degree. According to the AP summary, substantially more students are leaving the state to attend college (1,469 in 2004) than students entering the state (411 in 2004). According to *Measuring Up 2004*, the State Report Card on Higher Education developed by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the state of Nevada has made improvements over the past decade in enrolling students in college immediately after high school. Yet there is still much improvement to be made, especially when considering the workforce needs of the state.

Millennium Scholarship. Governor Guinn's Millennium Scholarship Program, funded by tobacco settlement funds, provides funding to allow Nevada's students to continue their education beyond high school. According to the *Millennium Scholarship Baseline Study* (2003), 66% of the students who were eligible to receive the scholarship received the Millennium Scholarship and attended a Nevada institution of higher education. The scholarship increased the amount of effort put into school work of 57% of the students who responded to the study's survey. In addition, 73% students responded that the scholarship affected their choice of college.

Nevada's Workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States Department of Labor, Nevada's job market has shown a significant increase 1,158,500 employed individuals in July 2004 to 1,232,400 by July 2005. This increase contributed to Nevada's having a significantly lower unemployment rate of 4.2 compared to the national rate of 5.0.

With the growth and changes in diversity of Nevada's population have come changes in workforce needs. According to the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation, the five occupations in Nevada with the largest employment are Retail Salespersons, Waiters & Waitresses, Janitors & Cleaners, Laborers, and Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners. On the other hand, the fastest growing occupations are Personal Financial Advisors, Network Systems & Data Communication Analysts, Pharmacists, Social & Human Service Assistants, and Loan Officers. The 25 highest paying occupations in Nevada fall into the categories of medicine, science, technology, and law.

Nevada is not lacking a consistent supply of workers. Rather, Nevada is lacking a balance of high paying to low paying jobs. Although Nevada has low unemployment and the fastest job creation rate in the nation, nearly 60 percent of Nevada's jobs pay less than a living wage for a three-person family. And of the occupations with the largest workforce in 2000 — largely service jobs — 87 percent did not pay a living wage. An increase in the availability of high-paying jobs will require a simultaneous increase in the education attainment of Nevada's students. Nevada high schools play a critical role.

High School Improvements & Innovations in Content Offerings

Nevada's high schools have implemented a number of programs and innovations in response to the challenges of providing all high school students with an education that ensures them a full scope of postsecondary opportunities. The examples listed below show the potential of high schools to improve in this area.

Career and Technical Education. The Career and Technical Education (CTE) high school programs and courses provide students with entry-level skills for work and post-secondary education. Over 43,000 students in the state are enrolled in CTE programs. A comparison of dropout rates indicate that in the 2002-2003 school year the dropout rate of CTE students (1.7%) was significantly lower than

the state average (6%). For the state, twelfth graders had a 9.6% dropout rate, while the CTE 12th graders held at 1.9%. For the 2003 graduating class, the CTE students' graduation rate was 79.5% while the state average was 70.7%. CTE programs promote high school and postsecondary connections, for example, the Tech Prep program provides juniors and seniors with the opportunity to start a college technical degree while still in high school. Participation in Tech Prep courses increased 34% from the 2002-2003 school year to the 2003-2004 school.

GEAR UP. The GEAR UP program has served high school 10th grade students and parents for four years. During the 2004-2005 school year, 2567 students and 3658 parents/guardians were part of the GEAR UP Cohort. The GEAR UP students came from all major ethnic groups, with Hispanic students being the largest represented group. The Free & Reduced Lunch average for the eighteen GEAR UP schools is higher (48.56%) than the state average (34.40%). The participating students received an average of 87.81 hours and parents received an average of 5.5 hours of service for the year. Of the participating students, 320 (12.5%) enrolled in advanced mathematics courses, 311 (12%) enrolled in advanced English/Language Arts courses, and 442 (17.2%) enrolled in advanced science courses. The GEAR UP student GPA increased from 1.94 in 2003-04 school year to 2.02 in the 2004-05 school year. The GEAR UP program saw improvements in the percent of parents that signed the Parent Contract (from 83% in 2001-2002 to 92% in 2004-2005) and the number of parents the school staff met about the program (from 66% in 2001-2002 to 92% in 2004-2005).

Advancement via Individual Determination. Clark County School District and Washoe County School District are at various stages of implementation of the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program. The mission of AVID is to ensure that ALL students, and especially the least served students who are in the middle will succeed in rigorous curriculum, will complete a rigorous college preparatory program, will enter mainstream activities of the school, will increase their enrollment in four-year colleges, and will become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society. Preliminary data is promising, with Sparks High School in Washoe County School District (AVID was initiated in 2001-02) showing over a four-year period that AVID students have a 90% enrollment in postsecondary education programs after high school.

Although the above programs are available in Nevada, there is a need for their expansion as well as systemic availability of options beyond the traditional offerings.

International Baccalaureate Program. The International Baccalaureate (IB) Program is a rigorous international academic curriculum preparing students for scholarship level entrance to any college or university in the world. The IB Program is structured specifically as a four-year college preparatory program. It encourages students to extend themselves beyond the minimum requirements, offers students a wide spectrum of advanced courses in all major subject areas, and provides students with varied opportunities to become involved in their school and community. Nevada has three IB programs offered in its high schools. Two of the IB programs are offered in the Clark County School District (CCSD) and one is in Washoe County School District (WCSD).

PRIORITY GOALS FOR VALUE OF DIPLOMA

From the comprehensive analysis of state improvement and high school data, several needs were identified as priority goals for high school reform. The goals that follow address the key strategy of the value of the high school diploma.

Initial Implementation Goals (Note: Initial Implementation Goals are those goals that are targeted for action during the first two years of implementation and will also link to longer range goals and actions.)

- Data indicate that there are low-performing populations of students in Nevada schools, particularly in the area of special education and English as a second language. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to develop methods of better meeting the needs of low-performing student populations and of ensuring that special education and LEP student populations have access to rigorous and relevant curriculum.
- Data indicate a recent drop in Nevada's graduation rate. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to increase the graduation rate and decrease the dropout rate in high schools, with special attention to low-performing student populations.
- A study of high school achievement data combined with Nevada economic and workforce data reveals that there is a need for greater understanding of the importance of education on the part of Nevada high school students. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to identify mechanisms that will help students value and act upon accessing rigorous and relevant high school courses.

Long Range Goals

- Data indicate that every student needs access to a diploma that is a gateway to multiple options upon graduation. Therefore, a long range goal will be to engage key collaborative partners in a review of the value of the current standard diploma and address methods to define and add rigor and relevance while expanding availability of alternate completion options.
- Data indicate that a large percentage of high school students are below proficiency in core academic subjects. Therefore, a long range goal will be to increase the percentage of high school students that improve in reading, English, mathematics, and science.

These goals address the concerns identified in the data that there is a graduation rate gap, dropout rate gap, and achievement gap.

REDESIGN HIGH SCHOOLS

CURRENT STATUS

Structure of the High School

Nevada has a range of high school structures; the majority are traditional 9^{th}-12^{th} grade schools, some are 6^{th} or 7^{th}-12^{th} grade schools, some are 10^{th}-12^{th} grade schools and two are 1^{st}-12^{th} grade schools (both charter schools). As reported in the *Education State Ranking 2004-2005*, the average size of a Nevada high school is 30% higher than the national average. Based on data reported as part of Nevada's 2005 annual accountability report, the median size of Nevada High Schools is 744 students. Both large and small high schools can present unique challenges for teachers and administrators. Just over 17% of Nevada high schools enroll more than 2,500 students and an additional 10% enroll over 2000 students. By contrast, approximately 12% of Nevada high schools enroll fewer than 100 students.

Funding Status

State statute NRS 387.121 guarantees the per student level of financial support. Although the average per-pupil expenditure increased by 1.5% over the previous year, the per-pupil funding in Nevada is anywhere from $1000 to $1500 below the national average. There is no categorical state funding for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students or Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students. All seventeen school districts in the state receive Title I funding, yet only 118 schools out of over 500 total schools in the state receive Title I funds. And of those 118 schools, only two are high schools due to the problem of accurately determining the number of students who could FRL status.

High School Improvements & Innovations in High School Structures

Nevada's high schools have implemented a number of programs and innovations to address the challenges of school size, structure, and resource distribution, as evident by the examples below.

Smaller Learning Communities. The urban districts struggle with the consequence of rapid student growth and large high schools. In response to this problem, Clark County School District acquired Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) federal funds for use with eight of its large high schools. Each SLC school-within-a-school had approximately 900 students enrolled in an SLC academy during the first year of the program, 2004-05. Anticipated success indicators include: (a) target schools will meet all annual yearly progress goals for participation and proficiency, as determined by the State of Nevada, in reading/language arts and mathematics, (b) the graduation rate will increase 5%, (c) the percentage of graduates who enroll in post secondary education during the semester following high school graduation will increase by 5%, (d) the percentage of graduates who are employed by the end of the first quarter after graduation will increase by 5%, (e) the percentage of students completing Advanced Placement courses and passing Advanced Placement tests will increase by 3% per year, and (f) 90% of teachers, students, and parents will indicate that they are satisfied with the SLC. At the end of the grant cycle in 2008 all students at each school will be part of a SLC.

Virtual Schools - Distance Education. Many of the school districts in the state of Nevada provide web-based resources and curriculum to Nevada high school students. There also are two public Virtual High Schools in the state of Nevada that provide credit-granting coursework for students. These virtual schools provide programs of distance education to students mainly in Clark and Washoe County School districts. In the 2002-03 school year there were just over 2,000 students who participated in a distance education course in our state. Over 6,000 students in Nevada enrolled in a distance education course during the 2004-2005 school year. Students enroll in Virtual High School courses for a variety of reasons including but not limited to: (a) taking courses not available at the student's home school (e.g. Advanced Placement courses), (b) making up high school credits, (c) providing access to students who are physically unable to attend a traditional high school, and (d) early graduates. Distance education courses provide students the opportunity to take courses through a variety of delivery methods such as DVDs, Internet, and videotapes. To meet their needs students have the ability to complete their coursework at anytime and from anywhere.

Charter Schools. The first statute authorizing charter schools in the state was passed by the Legislature in 1997. For the 2004-2005 school year, there were twelve school district-sponsored and four state-sponsored charter schools in operation. Charter Schools are designed to bring innovative educational models to the public school sector and provide options for students and parents. Nevada charter high schools offer a wide variety of unique program delivery options including online education, fine arts, career and technical training, college preparation, and project-based learning.

PRIORITY GOALS FOR REDESIGN

From the comprehensive analysis of state improvement and high school data, several needs were identified as priority goals for high school reform. The goals that follow address the key strategy of high school redesign.

Initial Implementation Goals

- Data show that there are successful high schools in Nevada that could serve as models for improvement, but that there is no method or support for communicating that information. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to adopt a framework for identification of successful high schools to serve as models and mentors for low-performing high schools.

- The examination of data surrounding high school structure in Nevada indicates that the current structure does not meet the needs of many students. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to incorporate innovative designs (i.e., graduation timing, structure of school, technology availability, enhanced senior year, scheduling, middle school design) in response to student needs and increase the access to more than traditional offerings.

- Data show that very few schools in Nevada offer career and technical training courses or optional credit opportunities. Therefore, initial implementation action goal will be to create more business and technical training opportunities and expand dual credit offerings.

Long Range Goal

- The examination of data surrounding the current status of high school structure in Nevada indicates that not all student populations have equal access to rigorous curriculum. Therefore, a long range goal will be to develop methods that identify and address obstacles to access for specific student populations to ensure access and opportunity to rigorous and relevant curriculum by all populations.

These goals address the concerns identified in the data that there are limited options in high school design and limiting factors in course taking and timing of high school completion.

GIVE STUDENTS THE EXCELLENT EDUCATORS THEY NEED

CURRENT STATUS

Nevada's Teachers

Of the 20,925 P-12 teachers, 3,972 (19%) were licensed high school educators, according to the March 2005 Research Bulletin published by the Nevada Department of Education. Nevada's average high school teacher salary was $44,363, compared to the national average for 2003-2004 of $46,826.

Data from the Nevada Teacher Contract Report, which reported all contracted licensed personnel hired as of October 1, 2004, indicated that 68% of core classes were being taught by teachers who met the "highly qualified" criteria established by the state in response to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Conversely, data from the Nevada State Report Card indicate that students who attend high poverty schools are more likely to be taught by teachers who do not meet the "highly qualified" criteria than students who attend low poverty schools. In low poverty schools, 78% of core classes are taught by "highly qualified" teachers, whereas in high poverty schools, 64% of the core classes were taught by teachers who met the highly qualified definition. In addition, the teacher population does not reflect the diversity of the student population, with the vast majority of Nevada's teachers (86%) being white. Hispanics and African Americans, each, represent only 5% of the state's teachers, even though these groups constitute 30% and 11% of the student population respectively. The number of teachers in each ethnic group has increased in recent years, with the exception of American Indians.

Instructional Practices

The State has high achievement expectations for its students as indicated by its standards and aligned assessments. A review of the standards indicates that mastery of the Nevada Content Standards requires students to develop higher order thinking skills. To ensure that the state standards are being taught and instruction is of the highest quality in order to increase student achievement for all students, observation of classroom instruction is necessary.

The *Teach for Success Classroom Observation Protocol* developed by WestEd has been used by the districts to observe instructional practices. Findings from the observations have been compiled into school composite reports to help schools define the professional development needs of the staff in order to increase student achievement. Analysis of data gathered from the observation of four hundred forty-one high school classes across the Western Region using this protocol provided insight into classroom instruction. With respect to observing the "Level of Cognition" based on Bloom's Taxonomy which describes the level of thinking reflected in the questions and activities from the lesson, 41% of the classrooms were observed to be at the *Remember* cognition level and 30% were at the *Understand* level, whereas less than 30% of the classrooms were observed to be at the higher cognition levels of *Apply* and *Analyze-Evaluate-Create*. Review of the categories in "Instructional Practices to Engage and Support all Students in Learning" indicate that the practices of *Student Seatwork with the Teacher Engaged* and *Teacher-Led Direct Instruction* were observed the most, while instructional practices to more actively engage and support students in learning described as *Active Learning* and *Student Conversation* were observed approximately 10% of the class time. Learning objectives were communicated to all students in 58% of the observed classrooms. Key vocabulary was emphasized in 30% of the classrooms. Consistent use of scaffolding techniques throughout learning to assist and support student understanding was observed in 31% of the classrooms. Strategies for creating and maintaining effective learning environments for students were observed in over 60% of classrooms, except for the strategy of establishing a literacy rich environment (observed in 23% of classrooms) and maximizing instructional time (observed in only 14% of classrooms).

This data indicates there is a need for professional development to improve the quality of instruction. Additionally, the direct relationship between teaching practices observed in these classrooms and the achievement of the students needs to be further studied.

All sixteen districts (with high schools) have adopted an evaluation tool for administrators to conduct evaluations of the teachers. At this time, there is not a systematic method of collecting data in the aggregate to analyze evaluation methodologies statewide.

Nevada's Principals

There were 929 principals and assistant principals (grades P-12) in the 2004-2005 school year, according to the March 2005 Research Bulletin published by the Nevada Department of Education. Nevada's average salary was $74,627, compared to the national average for 2003-2004 of $80,500.

Teacher retention is influenced in part by the quality of administrative instructional leadership. In order to enhance leadership excellence, the Nevada Recruitment and Retention Task Force, chartered by the National Governor's Association, has made the following recommendations to the Nevada Commission on Professional Standards:

- Review administrative licensure requirements and recertification requirements to ensure that Nevada has well-defined leadership standards in place for what administrators should know and be able to do. Define these standards for administrators as the Nevada Leadership Standards (NLS). Recommend that standards specifically address the issue of supporting and retaining quality teachers. Suggest NLS represent the projected revision of Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards and recent research by McREL's team of Waters and Marzano that identified the characteristics of principals that are tied to student achievement.

- Review administrator preparation programs to incorporate the Nevada Leadership Standards into content and practice.

- Design and plan a statewide model for school leaders aligned to NLS for professional development, mentoring/induction, and evaluation. Embed research-based leadership behaviors that lead to retaining quality teachers in the model.

- Embed NLS within current practice to reflect the standards throughout the Nevada educational system with an outcome of improved retention and support of quality teachers and therefore, improved student learning. Construct innovative delivery methods to address rural districts' isolation concerns.

Each of the four legislatively mandated regional professional development programs has incorporated an administrative strand into their five year professional development plan.

Nevada's High School Counselors

High school counselors play an important role in the post secondary planning of high school students, thus students need excellent counselors as well. Based on Northwest Accreditation standards, the ratio for secondary counselors to students is 450:1. This disparity between need and service are a concern. Nevada requires that counselors be of high quality. The Nevada School Counseling Program Standards are aligned with the national standards of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). The standards serve as a practical framework for Nevada school districts to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that promote and enhance career development, academic achievement and personal/social growth for all students.

High School Improvements & Innovations

Nevada high schools have implemented incentives, professional development, and recognition innovations to increase the quality of their teachers and principals. These are first steps in establishing a

cohesive system that aligns curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development for improved teaching and student learning at Nevada's high schools.

Teacher Incentives. The State of Nevada has initiated and expanded several incentives to retain effective schools. These are as follows:

- Continuation of signing bonuses for new teachers beginning in 2001. The 2005 Legislature appropriated $6.052 million in FY06 and $6.354 million in FY07 to support $2000 per new teacher hire.
- The 2005 Legislature appropriated $16,138,996 in FY06 and $18,433,608 in FY07 to support the purchase of 1/5 retirement credit for teachers who teach at a school which carries the designation of "need for improvement" or at a school that has at least 65% of the pupils who are at-risk.

A companion appropriation was an additional $9,369,907 in FY06 and 49,763,443 in FY07 to support the purchase of the 1/5 retirement credit for licensed personnel in hand to fill positions such as mathematics teachers, science teachers, special education teachers, English as a Second Language specialists and school psychologists. In order to offset early retirement, the Legislature passed a law allowing retired staff in hand to fill positions to be rehired upon approval from the Superintendent and continue to receive retirement benefits while actively employed in the state.

- The Legislature appropriated $5 million per year of the biennium for grants to school districts to adopt a program of performance pay and enhanced compensation for recruitment, retention and mentoring of licensed personnel at at-risk schools.

In addition to the monetary incentives provided, there is a need for heightened support to schools with persistent low performance to help turn them around.

Professional Learning Communities. The incorporation of professional learning communities is a statewide effort. Nevada has 14 out of 17 districts that are developing the capacity of educators to function as members of formal professional learning communities (PLC) in order to achieve wide-scale sustainable improvements in teaching and learning.

The Nevada Department of Education has provided a means of communication between PLCs across the state at the Nevada Professional Development website. The Nevada professional development website online administrator forum <http://nv.profdev.net/plcforum.html> was developed to allow discussion on issues of implementation of the cultural transformation elements of professional learning communities for improving instruction and thus increasing achievement of all students. The following constituents network on the forum: School Administrators, Aspiring Administrators, Central Office Administrators, Regional Professional Development Program Staff, State Department of Education Staff, State Board of Education, and University/State and Community College Staff. A comprehensive resource document and list of resources were posted to the forum to highlight the research, attributes, endorsement by authorities and organizations, and value for staff and students. School and district stories of implementation are included on the forum.

Executive Doctoral Programs. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas and the University of Nevada, Reno offer executive doctoral programs (Doctor of Education degree) focusing on the knowledge, skill development, and capacity of school leaders in their current and future leadership positions. These programs use a cohort-based approach featuring problems-based learning and a theory-into-practice model in thematic seminars. A nontraditional scheduling format is used with classes

primarily on the weekends. Emphasis is placed on identifying and developing solutions to real-life problems.

Teacher Qualification & Recognition. A number of Nevada's teachers have received qualifications and recognitions beyond the "highly qualified" criteria. Since 2001, 125 Nevada teachers have achieved National Board Certification. Since 1983, 33 science teachers and 30 math teachers in the state have been honored as recipients of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Other recognitions include the Nevada Teacher of the Year Awards, Superintendent of the Year Award, Nevada Public Education Foundation's Education Hall of Fame Educator Award, and the Milken Awards. All of these awards are peer-nominated with panels making final decisions. Each award celebrates excellence in education and dedication to the profession.

PRIORITY GOALS FOR EDUCATORS

From the comprehensive analysis of state improvement and high school data, several needs were identified as priority goals for high school reform. The goals that follow address the key strategy of providing students with the excellent educators that they need.

Initial Implementation Goals

- A review of the data regarding instruction and best practices shows that, though professional development mechanisms exist, they are not all aligned. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to align professional development to instructional needs through data-driven decision making in order to impact instructional practices to increase student achievement.
- Achievement data and instructional observation data indicate a need for more focus on content reading and math in high school. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to increase the depth of knowledge and pedagogy in content reading and in math for all high school teachers.
- An examination of the statistics regarding highly qualified teachers in Nevada shows a need for more teacher support and more highly qualified teachers at low-performing schools. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to expand incentives and support to teachers in order to better equalize the percent of highly qualified teachers in at risk high schools through expanded incentives and other means of support.
- Data regarding the academic achievement of different student populations point to a need for focused professional development. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to increase availability of training in appropriate instruction to diverse student populations in inclusive settings.

Long Range Goals

- Classroom observation data indicate that there is not a systematic way to evaluate the impact of instructional practices on increasing student achievement. Therefore, a long range goal will be to develop strategies of analysis and feedback mechanisms that link educator evaluation, student performance, pre-service preparation, and professional development in order to improve instructional practices.
- Examination of the state's sixteen districts containing high schools reveals that there is a basic structure (i.e. Regional Professional Development Programs, local districts, Nevada Department

of Education, Nevada Institutions of Higher Education) in place to promote the goals of the Blueprint through professional development. Therefore, a long range goal will be to utilize this structure to expand the system of professional development as a vehicle for carrying out the goals of the Blueprint.

These goals address the concerns identified in the data that there is not a systematic way to evaluate the impact of instructional practices on increasing student achievement and that there is not a systematic way of using professional development as a means of sharing what is working in Nevada high schools.

MEASURE PROGRESS AND HOLD HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES ACCOUNTABLE

CURRENT STATUS

Statewide Data System

The Nevada Department of Education, in coordination with local Nevada school districts and a third party vendor, Otis Educational Systems, has worked over the last year and a half to enhance the state wide accountability information system, the System of Accountability Information for Nevada (SAIN). The state, on a daily basis, collects information directly from 17 disparate local Student Information Systems and integrates these data into a state student information database. The breadth of data collected is vast, including such items as demographic, class enrollment, attendance, discipline, and assessment information.

Also integrated into this system is an automated unique student identification system that tracks students throughout their P-12 educational career in Nevada. This system can be expanded to allow tracking of students as they matriculate to Nevada colleges. The access capabilities of the system allow the Nevada Department of Education to develop customized data collection mechanisms with each district. The Nevada Department of Education is currently applying for the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems grant in order to expand the breadth of this foundational system.

Accountability Results of Nevada High Schools

Nevada has maintained a heightened focus on student achievement for over ten years through a variety of means. This includes a lengthy history of high stakes student accountability founded on the High School Proficiency Examination program (dating back to the early 1980s) linked to graduation with a standard diploma, an established system of accountability reporting, and a more recent (mid 1990s) system of school designation that identifies schools that are in need of improvement.

Table 11 details the AYP high school results in the 2004-2005 school year. Forty-six percent of the high schools did not make AYP (down from 52% in 2003-2004). Based on the 2003-04 results, past performance, and a federally required increase in state annual achievement goals (to 77.9% in English/Language Arts and to 52.3% in Math) for the 2004-05 school year, Nevada had expected an increase in high schools that would not meet the AYP target. Instead, there was increase in high schools that met the AYP target. In addition, 15% of the high schools were designated as Exemplary Schools or High Achieving Schools for impressive student achievement on statewide assessments and for exceeding the requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress.

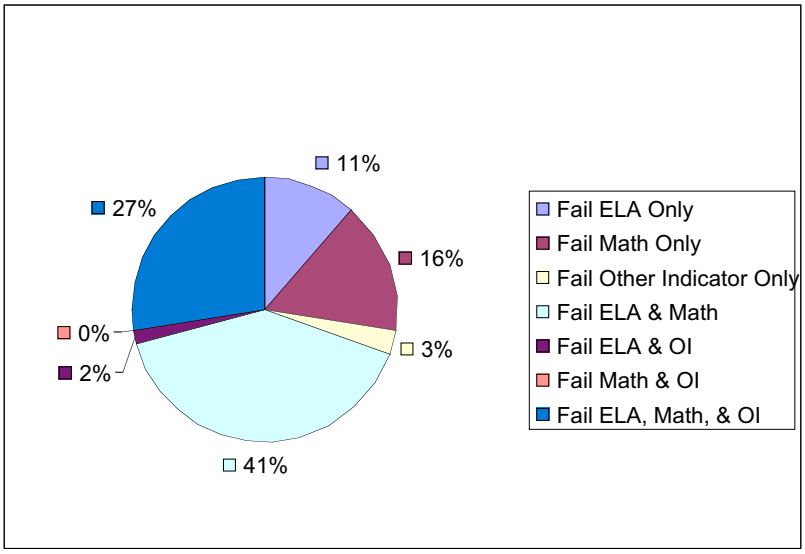
Table 11 – AYP Results

AYP Results	2003-2004	2004-2005
Number of High Schools	119	132
AYP School Classification		
Made AYP	57	71
Did Not Make AYP	62	61
Achievement Reason For Not Making AYP		
Missed ELA Only	10	7
Missed Math Only	4	10
Missed Other Indicator (OI) Only	2	2
Missed ELA & Math	42	25
Missed ELA & OI	1	1
Missed Math & OI	1	0
Missed ELA, Math, & OI	3	17
Reason Not Meeting ELA Criteria		
Missed ELA Participation Only	19	11
Missed ELA Status Only	8	5
Missed ELA Participation & Status	29	34
Reason For Not Meeting Math Criteria		
Missed Math Participation Only	6	7
Missed Math Status Only	31	13
Missed Math Participation & Status	13	32
AYP School Designation		
Exemplary	4	2
High Achieving – Status	14	4
High Achieving – Growth	3	14
Adequate	36	41
Watch List	31	20
In Need of Improvement (Year 1-Hold)	0	10
In Need of Improvement (Year 1)	31	20
In Need of Improvement (Year 2)	0	21
In Need of Improvement (Year 3)	0	0

* OI – Other Indicator: Graduation rate is used for the whole school and for each ethnic group. Average daily attendance is used for the IEP, LEP, and Low Socio-Economic Status student groups.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of schools that failed to meet specific AYP criteria. The largest percentage of schools (41%) did not make AYP due to failure in both English/Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. When Math results below are combined, 84% of the high schools failed this indicator. When ELA results below are combined, 81% of the high schools failed this indicator. Nevada's data are consistent with AYP trends across the nation.

Figure 1 – Reasons for High Schools Not Meeting the AYP Target



*OI – Other Indicator: Graduation rate is used for the whole school and for each ethnic group. Average daily attendance is used for the IEP, LEP, and Low Socio-Economic Status student groups

A review of AYP designation results with respect to the performance of disaggregated student populations in the content areas of English/Language Arts and Mathematics reflects the following populations not making AYP:

- Of the 20 high schools on Watchlist (first year AYP failure)
  - For ELA:
    - 5 schools included Individualized Education Plan (IEP) students
    - 5 schools included minority populations and/or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students
    - 2 schools included Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) students
  - For Math:
    - 6 schools included Individualized Education Plan (IEP) students
    - 4 schools included minority populations and/or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students
    - 3 schools included Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) students

- Of the 20 high schools In Need of Improvement-Year One (second year AYP failure)
  - For ELA:
    - 10 schools included Individualized Education Plan (IEP) students
    - 12 schools included minority populations and/or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students
    - 5 schools included Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) students
  - For Math:
    - 6 schools included Individualized Education Plan (IEP) students
    - 4 schools included minority populations and/or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students
    - 3 schools included Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) students

- Of the 21 high schools In Need of Improvement-Year Two (second year AYP failure)
  - For ELA:
    - 15 schools included Individualized Education Plan (IEP) students
    - 15 schools included minority populations and/or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students
    - 6 schools included Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) students
  - For Math:
    - 14 schools included Individualized Education Plan (IEP) students
    - 18 schools included minority populations and/or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students
    - 3 schools included Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) students

School District Improvement Plans

Sixteen of the seventeen school districts have high schools; students from the Esmeralda County School District attend high school in Nye County School District. A review of the 2004 District Improvement Plans for goals related to high school resulted in an identification of the school districts' primary needs related to high school student achievement. According to the review, twelve of the sixteen school districts identified improvement of student achievement in high school English/Language Arts as a priority need, fifteen school districts identified improvement of achievement in high school mathematics as a priority need, and four school districts identified improvement of achievement in high school writing as a priority need. The review identified the student populations targeted for each of the designated priority needs. Table 12 below shows the sixteen school districts that targeted each of the student populations for each of the prioritized goals.

Table 12: Number of districts targeting student subpopulations in District Improvement Plans

Prioritized Goal	All	IEP	LEP	FRL	AI	H	AFA
English/Language Arts Achievement	4	10	3	4	2	7	2
Mathematics Achievement	5	11	3	5	4	5	1
Writing Achievement	1	2	2	1	3	2	0

IEP=Individualized Education Plan, LEP=Limited English Proficient, FRL=Free & Reduced Lunch, AI=American Indian, H=Hispanic, AFA=African American

As shown in the table above, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) were identified by the most school districts as the student population to target for improvements in ELA and Math achievement. The low number of school districts in the category of African American students is misleading; there are a number of school districts whose African American student population is very small and not calculated into accountability results.

PRIORITY GOALS FOR PROGRESS & ACCOUNTABILITY

From the comprehensive analysis of state improvement and high school data, several needs were identified as priority goals for high school reform. The goals that follow address the key strategy of monitoring progress and holding schools and colleges accountable.

Initial Implementation Goals

- Examining the role of the state's accountability information system reveals that the system can be expanded to provide data to better inform instruction. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to enhance the statewide data system to provide individual student performance data to inform instruction and to evaluate and share what works.
- Examining the role of the state's accountability information system reveals that the system does not yet provide information that connects the P-12 system, higher education, and careers. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to enhance the statewide data system to provide longitudinal data for students entering careers from the Nevada P-16 education system.

Long Range Goals

- Review of the state's accountability information system shows that the current system is functioning but should be expanded. Therefore, a long range goal will be to enhance the statewide data system that monitors longitudinal growth at the student level and school level over P-12 range and incorporate a 12^{th} – 16^{th} monitoring component.
- Review of the state's accountability information system shows that the current system is a viable one for supporting high school reform. Therefore, a long range goal will be to enhance the statewide data system to make available necessary data to evaluate the effectiveness of the goals in Nevada's Blueprint and resulting improvement strategies for P-16 education.

These goals address the concerns identified in the data that there is a lack of identification of best practices being used at successful Nevada high schools that increase student achievement and that there is a need to look at growth over time at the student and school level.

IMPROVING EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

CURRENT STATUS

Nevada's Educational Governance

A review of the description in the introduction reveals the following: Nevada has seventeen county-based school districts governed by local boards of trustees. The Nevada State Board of Education leads the Nevada Department of Education in state education governance. The Nevada System of Higher Education led by the Board of Regents governs the universities and community colleges in the state.

Nevada Statewide P-16 Council

The P-16 Council brief states: "The primary mission of the Nevada Statewide P-16 Council is to ensure cooperation and articulation between P-12, higher education, business, parents, and the community. The council brings together the education, business, and political communities to make policy

recommendations that ensure coordination between these systems, with the overarching goal of better preparing all Nevada high school graduates to begin credit-bearing work in college and/or to take their place in well-paying positions in Nevada's workforce."

Communication

Specific to the requirements laid out in Nevada revised Statute (NRS) 385 are the communication goals of providing high school and middle school students, parents, teachers and counselors with information concerning: (a) the requirements for admission to an institution of higher education and the opportunities for financial aid; (b) the availability of Millennium Scholarships; and (c) the need for a pupil to make informed decisions about his or her curriculum in middle school, junior high school and high school in preparation for success after graduation. These activities are currently being carried out by school districts but not in a uniform manner. Nevada's Blueprint will support and enhance the communication expectations of information dissemination related to high school requirements.

The Nevada Department of Education website recently underwent a system-wide renovation to improve communication methods and functionality with internal and external audiences. Ongoing website improvements include a school improvement support website, an electronic grant management system, and continued upgrades to the statewide data and accountability systems. In addition, the Nevada Department of Education has regular and annual dissemination meetings with local and state stakeholders.

PRIORITY GOALS FOR EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE

From the comprehensive analysis of state improvement and high school data, several needs were identified as priority goals for Nevada's Blueprint. The goals that follow address the key strategy for improving educational governance.

Initial Implementation Goal

- A review of the Nevada State Improvement Plan and communication system shows that efforts are in place to include the public in educational initiatives, but that these efforts could be expanded. Therefore, initial implementation action will be to develop and/or enhance, in coordination with key collaborative partners, communication mechanisms in order to make apparent and keep up-to-date with high school improvement efforts.

Long Range Goals

- A review of the communication system in place between schools and the public reveals that not all students are receiving the information they require concerning post secondary education. Therefore, a long range goal will be to expand mechanisms to make clear the requirements and expectations of post secondary options in order to obtain P-16 alignment with business and community expectations.
- A review of the Nevada State Improvement Plan and communication system shows that efforts are in place to include the public in educational initiatives, but that these efforts could be expanded. Therefore, a long range goal will be to provide for ongoing dialogue between collaborative partners to carry out goals of Nevada's Blueprint.

These goals address the concerns identified in the data that there is a need for alignment between the requirements of P-12 and the expectations of post secondary options. These goals also serve as the umbrella to all previous goals, as governance dictates what work will actually get done.

CONCLUSION

STARS: Nevada's Blueprint for High School Improvement constitutes a comprehensive framework to improve high schools in Nevada utilizing research-based practices to develop the Blueprint as well as to identify goals and strategies for solutions. As reflected in both the *National High School Alliance, Call to Action* and in the *NGA State Action Agenda, Getting it Done*, change requires a comprehensive and sequential plan which addresses core principles and strategies that support high academic achievement, closes the achievement gap and prepares our youth for postsecondary options and careers.

Nevada's Blueprint provides a comprehensive framework for Nevada to address its high school improvement needs through the interdependent short and long range goals reflected in the Blueprint.

Nevada's Blueprint creates a plan that addresses improving the rigor and relevance of our current course offerings, as well as assuring access for all students to these challenging classes. The plan expands the availability of non-traditional high school structures and programs and increases the opportunities for professional development, networking and other supports for Nevada's high schools in greatest need. The plan expands Nevada's data collection system of student performance and other relevant data for the purpose of informing improvement planning and implementation and evaluating the efficacy of Nevada's Blueprint strategies. The plan strengthens the communication by creating a forum for continuing dialogue of key collaborative partners and policy leaders throughout the state, focused on moving Nevada's Blueprint forward.

Appendix A

The 2003 session of the Nevada Legislature adopted a comprehensive bill that amended Nevada's assessment, accountability, and school improvement requirements to incorporate the federal No Child Left Behind Act and expand state initiatives in these areas. State legislation required that the State Board of Education develop a state improvement plan. The Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 385.34691 established the requirements for this plan. Under state requirements, the Board submitted the plan to the Governor, Committee, and Bureau, Board of Regents of the University of Nevada, the Council on Academic Standards, the Board of Trustees of each school district, and the governing body of each charter school on December 15 2004.

The following is an executive summary of the plan:

STATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN
Executive Summary

The Nevada Department of Education developed an improvement planning framework – the Student Achievement Gap Elimination (SAGE) process – which has been utilized in working with Title I schools identified as In Need of Improvement. The Nevada Department of Education Improvement Planning Team used this same process to investigate the improvement needs of the state education system. The first step was to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of current state data.

Needs Assessment Summary

Successes Found. During the past decade, the state of Nevada has built an infrastructure supporting standards-based reform. The state organizational system and culture support professional development through resource allocation and improvement planning. Putting effort toward planning for and providing a safe environment is a fundamental feature of Nevada's educational process. Through various state initiatives, the state has made information about Nevada's schools and their performance much more readily available to parents and the public. Attendance rates are relatively high and there are some successes in English/Language Arts (ELA) and math performance at the school level among all student groups. There is also a trend of greater participation on the college entrance examinations and higher rates of college attendance of graduating seniors.

Areas of Concern. At this time, there is not a specific process in place to ensure that school district curricula are fully aligned to the state content and performance standards. Professional development is planned at school, school district, Regional Professional Development Program (RPDP), and state levels without a specific requirement for alignment to improvement goals identified through improvement planning processes. In addition, consistent definitions for behavioral violations have not been established for Nevada's school districts and the need for increased parental involvement in education remains an ongoing concern across the state. Disparities between ethnic groups in test performance and graduation rates are significant and longstanding. Similar disparities are exhibited when special populations (low Socioeconomic Status, Students with Disabilities, and Limited English Proficient students) are compared with the state as a whole. Adequate resources need to be dedicated to proper interpretation and use of school, school district, and state data. With the identification of more and more schools in need of improvement, as well as the emergence of school district and state sponsored charter schools, the lack of capacity and flexible resources to assist these schools becomes increasingly apparent.

State Improvement Plan Priority Goals

Five priority goals were identified based on the needs identified through the comprehensive needs assessment. The goals are listed below.

1. To engage the full community in a cohesive and collaborative statewide improvement planning process that drives all levels (school, school district and state) and that supports improved student performance by maintaining a focus on teaching, student learning, and parental involvement.

2. To use consistent and relevant data at all levels (school, school district, and state) to drive the improvement planning process and to evaluate the effectiveness of planned programs and activities in order to provide feedback for plan revisions.

3. To identify research-based strategies in order to set performance expectations to improve instruction in core academic subjects, to reduce achievement gaps, and to improve the performance of all students.

4. To implement a statewide approach to research-based professional development and pre-service educator preparation primarily focused on data-driven needs as identified in school, school district, and state improvement plans.

5. To implement a statewide initiative to focus on secondary education, including strategies to improve academic achievement, increase graduation rates, decrease dropout rates, improve distribution of information to the public, and increase post-secondary program enrollment and success rates.

Full copy of the State Improvement Plan is available at www.doe.nv.gov